House Resources Committee

Water and Power Subcommittee

Oversight Hearing on

Water Supply and Reliability:

The Role of Water Recycling

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Testimony by:

General (Ret.) Eugene E. Habiger

President and Chief Executive Officer

San Antonio Water System

Good morning. I am Gene Habiger, President/CEO of the San Antonio Water System (SAWS). Thank you for inviting me to share with you the importance of recycled water not only for San Antonio, but also for many communities in Texas and our nation. SAWS is a municipally owned water utility serving approximately one million people in South Central Texas.

We provide drinking water, wastewater and recycled water service to nearly 300,000 connections including three military bases (Lackland AFB, Brooks City Base, Fort Sam Houston). Reclaimed, or recycled, water is an important tool for the nation's cities as they work to manage the water demands of a growing population.

Nowhere is this more true than in Texas - where over 100 recycled water systems put recycled water to beneficial use. The reasons for such an abundance of reclaimed water applications in Texas range from the need to dispose of reclaimed water to meet water quality concerns in receiving streams or from the need to develop "drought proof" supplies for business and industry. San Antonio provides a good example of the critical role of recycled water for meeting water resource needs.

In 2002, SAWS completed the first phase of its system to recycle treated wastewater effluent for irrigation and industrial uses. For San Antonio, recycled water is an important part of our integrated approach to water resource management that relies on reducing, reusing and recycling our water supplies before developing new fresh water resources. Our recycled water is of very high quality - almost to drinking water standards. Two cities that are comparable to our water quality levels are San Jose and San Diego.

We have reduced our per capita water demands by approximately 32% over the last 15 years, so that we are using less water today than we did in 20 years ago even though our population has grown by 55%.

To further supplement our water supply, we began using recycled water for cooling lakes required for the cities electrical utility. This system was expanded to include a 35,000 acre-foot/year direct reuse, or recycled water, system which provides a firm, drought-proof supply for industries, cooling towers, military bases, universities, municipal parks, golf courses and river maintenance.

This 72-mile pipeline system took about 6 years to design and construct at a cost of over $125 million dollars.

San Antonio is well recognized for its 'River Walk'. The city of San Antonio welcomes over 8 million visitors a year - generating over $4 billion of economic impact. Our Recycled Water System is designed to supply 4,250 acre-feet per year, or over a billion gallons, into the San Antonio River - thus assuring a reliable

source of water year round.

San Antonio has determined that we must do everything we can to conserve and reserve our existing resources. Additionally, the decision to invest in this source of supply was especially important for our community as we faced limits on our historic water supply due to pumping from the Edwards Aquifer, home to threatened and endangered species.

For this reason, San Antonio may be uniquely positioned for achieving clear federal purposes as it implements its long-range water resources programs including recycled water. These purposes include, as a minimum, ecosystem restoration and protection of endangered species.

In addition to the funds expended for the recycled water program, SAWS will invest in excess of $2.6 billion dollars over the next 50 years to diversify its water supply. This will reduce our reliance on the Edwards Aquifer, provide us with a reliable water supply for San Antonio and help maintain the habitat of federally protected species.

Other communities, which are not faced with endangered species issues, are using recycled water as a way to ensure that key industries and business interests are provided a secure source of water even during drought. Especially during these times of economic uncertainty, ensuring reliable water is critically important for protecting our local, state and federal economies; for protecting jobs.

Just as local users are helping to achieve federal purposes, the federal government can assist communities further the use of recycled water by:

1. Providing grants or cost-share funds for studies related to water quality and the treatment needed for use of recycled water in certain applications (e.g. concrete for highway construction, industrial uses such as micro-chip or other specialty manufacturing, etc.);

2. Providing assistance and training for design, construction and operation of recycled water systems;

3. Creating incentives for the reuse of water from wastewater treatment plants rather than discharging it into streams to further the goals of Clean Water Act when low-flow conditions in the receiving stream is not a concern;

4. Requiring the use of recycled water at federal installations, federal office buildings, for projects funded with federal funds, and by contractors when such supply is available; and

5. Funding such use from the federal budget rather than shifting those costs to the local communities.

These are just a few ideas of policies and programs that could be developed to encourage the development of recycled water facilities throughout the nation. Such use of our precious natural resources is an important component of managing the needs of a growing population, protecting the environment and keeping our economy vibrant.

Again, thank you for inviting me to speak today. I will be happy to answer any questions you have.

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